

REBECCA FOUST

Thanksgiving

In the crush of the sidewalk crowd
at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade,
I was hemmed in on all sides, everyone
smiling and pointing at Mickey and Minnie and Pluto
drifting swollen and slow overhead.

It was my first trip to any big city,
invited by my best friend in the sixth grade,
and Mom said no because we lived in a small town
and New York is where people get murdered
and mugged.

I begged until she gave in, pressing \$32 in small bills
into my hand as I said goodbye.

It felt like a fortune, and my secret, cherished plan
was to not spend a cent and give it all back when
I returned.

I don't remember how we got there or where we stayed
or one other single thing we did except for dinner
at Mama Leone's, where I felt like I should,
but did not, offer to pay. The parade was the main event,
and I was transfixed by it, a world-made festival
of moving marvels, the leaden skies of my childhood
suddenly open and breathing with windows and doors.
Floats on the street, bright balloons in the sky,
so many people I didn't know close all around,
and I lost track of my friend, then became aware
of a pressure not like all the other pressures,
something particular and rhythmic and urgent.

He wore a gray windbreaker and had long, greasy hair
combed over his bald head, and his face was damp
and imploring. I had not seen a man's penis before.
It was pale and soft as a slug and my first thought was,
wait is that snot on my leg, and how did it get there.

I didn't say a word, just froze till he melted away
into the crowd, then I edged to the curb to stand for
the rest
of the parade next to a man in a blue uniform.
I didn't tell him, nor my friend, nor her parents, nor
my mother. And no, I don't recall the exact date,
or time, or street corner, or what I was wearing then.
Telling would have ruined the trip for everyone,
and Mom would only have cried, again, and probably
not let me next leave town until I was forty.
And I was not clear on why but still knew for sure
I was somehow to blame.

I gave Mom all the money back just like I had planned,
and oh, she was relieved not to have to explain
to Dad why we were eating Hamburger Helper
four days in a row. That's what I remember best:
she was so, so happy and relieved,
and I did that for her.

Rebecca Foust has published three books and three chap-
books of poetry. Recent recognitions include the Cavay
Poetry Prize; the James Hearst Poetry Prize, judged by Jane
Hirshfield; and fellowships from Hedgebrook, the MacDowell
Colony, Sewanee Writers' Conference, and the Frost Place.
She was Marin County Poet Laureate 2017-2019 and works
now as the poetry editor for Women's Voices for Change, an
assistant editor for *Narrative*, and coproducer of the poetry
show *Rising Voices* for Marin TV in California.

LORRAINE SHEMESH

Attached, 2018
Oil on canvas, 64 x 61½ in



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